

FTN Accessibility

created by Stephanie Rosen ssrosen@gmail.com and the FTN Accessibility Committee.

This document is designed to aid Feminist Technology Network (FTN) members as we develop our online network, platforms, content, archive, and courses. Accessibility is a core principle of the FTN and the Distributed Open Collaborative Course (DOCC). That is, the FTN and its Courses are designed to cross boundaries established by our material conditions and often enforced by traditional pedagogies and the MOOC. Making our online presence accessible is part of dismantling barriers associated with ability, location, access to technologies, class, gender, race, education, and language.

In online communities, *web accessibility* refers to making content that is perceivable, operable, and usable by users with disabilities (and who may use specialized assistive technologies) and robust enough to operate across devices and in the temporality of changing standards. The authoritative document on accessibility is the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG 2.0) by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Accessibility Working Group. In reality, best practices for accessibility eliminate barriers associated with ability and access to technology, which always intersect with other material conditions and identities. For our purposes, accessibility can be theorized as a site of intersection where ability and technology are but two vectors. For example, Facebook has design issues which make it difficult for some users with disabilities to navigate, but Facebook may reach communities of users who are not linked in to institutional channels of communication. As we want to reach both, the question is always how to design and distribute our content so as to not automatically exclude any community, but rather to construct an archive with many unguarded entrances.

The document is organized by activities related to FTN work. Each section includes information on best practices and links to more information. “Accessibility” in this document generally refers to web accessibility in the sense used among online communities.

Web Accessibility Overview

[Short Introduction to Web Accessibility](#), by W3C. Defining accessibility and arguing for its importance.

[What is Web Accessibility](#), by A Bright Clear Web. Overview with a focus on the needs of different user groups.

[Comprehensive Introduction to Web Accessibility](#), WebAIM.

Content Creation

General, design for Web

- [WCAG 2.0](#): the authoritative and comprehensive standards for web accessibility, with deep documentation. Highly technical.
- [Checklist WCAG 2.0](#), by accessibility website WebAIM. This translates the WCAG 2.0 into a checklist you can use to evaluate your design.
- [Guide to Best Practices](#), by University of Michigan libraries. Excellent, very useful guide, organized by design elements (e.g. menus, links, applets), rather than accessibility principles. Many links to further information, a great place to start when designing and building.
- [Making Accessible Web Pages](#), by Colorado State University: Simple overview of the most common issues in accessible design and how to do them right.
- [Designing for Accessibility](#), by WebAIM. Useful for early stages of planning and design.

Blog, Writing for the Web

Even simple text blog posts can be more or less accessible. Frequent issues occur around link text, heading structure, lists, and visual style and layout.

- [Checklist for accessible blog posts](#), by BlogAccessibility.com
- Tips to [make your blog accessible](#), especially to blind users, from American Foundation for the Blind.

Visual Media

Visual media online must include “equivalent” information in text.

- Best practices for creating [alternative text for images](#). Good overview by WebAIM.
- Creating [accessible Infographics](#), by AccessIQ.

Video and Multimedia

Video content must be presented in alternative media: transcript, captions, and/or audio description. ([Definitions of transcripts, captions, and audio descriptions](#), by WebAIM.) The most important step in creating accessible multimedia is creating a full transcript. The transcript may facilitate caption creation and other resources, but will also serve as a stand-alone resource for those who can access text but not video.

- [Overview on accessible multimedia](#), by Cannect. With links to further resources.
- [Transcripts: how-to and best practices](#), from AccessIQ.
- [Low cost solutions to make video accessible](#), from AccessIQ.
- [Increasing accessibility of web conferences](#), from the FDA.
- Information on [types of video captioning](#), by Iowa State U.
- Comprehensive [Frequently Asked Questions on multimedia accessibility](#), from W3C.

Audio

- [Transcripts how-to and best practices](#), from AccessIQ.

Platforms

Any Learning Content Management System (LCMS) developed or used for the DOCC should ideally reflect the pedagogical goals of the course, including but not limited to accessibility. Among the major LCMS, Moodle and Desire2Learn significantly outperform Sakai and Blackboard in terms of accessibility (as of 2013).

Reports on Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS)

[E-learning Accessibility Report](#), by W3C.

- This report notes that ATutor has been designed with accessibility in mind, and that Blackboard has added some fixes to address assistive technology user on the student side, though not on the instructor side (i.e., Blackboard has barriers to the instructor who uses assistive technology). The report brings up some questions about MOOC platforms and their accessibility responsibilities, but does not review the extant options.

[A Comparison of LCMS Accessibility](#), by Hadi Rangin, U Illinois; Ken Petri, Ohio State University; Marc Thompson, U Illinois; Joe Humbert, Indiana U; Dan Hahn, U Illinois.

- Report compares four systems: Blackboard 9.1 Service Pack 6 & 8, Desire2Learn (D2L) 10, Moodle 2.3, and SAKAI 2.8. The systems are tested for accessibility across ten different features (e.g. gradebook, discussion forum, login). **Moodle and D2L both score above average accessibility on 8 out of 10 features.** Sakai scores above average on 4 features. Blackboard scores below average on all features but one.

Accessible Learning Content Management Systems (LCMS)

[ATutor](#): a learning management system designed to be accessible, the first “inclusive LCMS,” compliant to the highest level with the WCAG 2.0. By far the most accessible, this LCMS is also free and open source. Its features reflect those of the other major LCMS’s.

Social Media

Popular mainstream social media sites still have accessibility issues that prevent people with disabilities from using them effectively. There are workarounds and best practices, but most importantly Facebook and/or Twitter should not be the sole repository of important and timely information from FTN. This information should also be available on the FTN Commons (or whatever the main site becomes) in an easy-to-read format. This could be accomplished by embedding Facebook and Twitter feeds on the page rather than uploading information more than once.

Facebook

- major accessibility challenges which make it difficult for some users with disabilities to navigate and use, but Facebook has made some [efforts to improve accessibility](#)
- to make FTN Facebook account as accessible as possible, include our website in the “About” section of the page, and include alternate contact information for users to seek more information. See more tips on [Facebook Accessibility](#) from Queen’s University

Twitter

Twitter reportedly has major accessibility barriers, but [Easy Chirp](#) is an alternate interface which allows users with disabilities to access Twitter. To make FTN Twitter Account and Tweets as accessible as possible:

- include website and contact information in profile
- in hashtags, use a capital letter to indicate the start of new words. this will optimize pronunciation by screen readers, and legibility for human readers: e.g. #FTNSummerWorkshop, not #ftnsummerworkshop
- see more tips on [Twitter Accessibility](#) from Queen's University